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## Self Inquiry or Self Enquiry: Who Am I?

(The following is an excerpt about **self-inquiry** or **self-enquiry** from the book, *Nothing Personal, Seeing Beyond the Illusion of a Separate Self* by Nirmala. You can download a PDF of the entire book for free by signing up for our monthly [newsletter here](#), or you can purchase the entire book by following the links [here](#).)

Beyond focusing on the content of our experience and even beyond noticing whether we're expanded or contracted, a wonderful question is: Who or what is experiencing this? This is a variation of the classic **self-inquiry** question, Who am I?

As I was going through my email the other day, I ran across a quote from A Course in Miracles that essentially said that you'll never find satisfaction in the world. This assertion is at the core of most spiritual teachings. Spiritual teachings and practices attempt to turn us in another direction, away from the usual places we look for satisfaction. They're designed to shift our focus from the world of form to Beingness. **Self inquiry** is one technique for doing that. In **self-inquiry**, we simply ask, Who am I? or What am I? or a variation on that, Who is having this experience?

When you look to see who is having this experience, you don't find anyone. There's nothing there. The Experiencer can't be experienced, just as the eye can't see itself. You don't find any thing, nothing you can touch or see or hear.

When nothing is discovered during self inquiry, people often keep looking instead for something they think they're supposed to find. It's only natural to look somewhere else when you don't find anything. We don't expect that nothing is the answer. So we go back to our mind for the answer—we think about it, check in our memory, or imagine a good answer—instead of just staying with the question. But self enquiry done only with the mind is dry—it lacks juice. After a while, because this experience is not very rich, the mind often gets bored and quits. There isn't much in self inquiry for the mind.



### Doing self enquiry with the whole heart

Another way to ask the **self enquiry** question is with your whole Heart. You ask it with everything you've got, as if your life depended on it. If you ask the self inquiry question with this kind of passion and intensity, it will bring you beyond what the mind is able to figure out. When you ask it with your whole Heart and you don't find an answer, you just stay there, not knowing. You just let yourself not know. There's nothing but that space, and you just stay present to that space, to that sense of there being nothing behind your eyes, nothing behind your thoughts, nothing behind your feelings. Instead of turning back to thing-ness when you don't find anything, you just stay there in the no-thing-ness and get curious about it. Nothing—what's that like?

In looking and finding nothing, what you discover is even more space. Staying with the **self inquiry** question, Who am I? opens up space. Nothingness is very spacious; there's a lot of room in it. When you stay in that nothingness, you discover that there's a lot of stuff in that space, stuff that is real in a way that the stuff in the world has never been real. What moves in that space are true qualities of Being, such as Love, Compassion, Insight, and Strength.

Every time you turn towards Beingness, a different quality shows up. Being has an infinite number of qualities, which show up fresh and different in every moment. These qualities can seem to exist in another dimension, as they have a depth and solidity about them that is more real than physical objects.

These qualities have been there in the nothingness all along, and as you stay with the nothingness, they begin to be apparent. One way of staying with the inward focus is by repeatedly asking the question, **Who Am I?** Stay with this self enquiry question even when you

experience nothing and have no idea who you are. Just ask, Who or what doesn't know?

## A New Article with More Detailed Instructions for Self-Enquiry

I recently added a new article with much more detailed information about the practice and purpose of self-inquiry. [Check it out here.](#)

## Keeping Self Inquiry Simple

Here is a recent blog post with some very simple instructions for [self-inquiry](#) for those who like to keep it simple :)

Self inquiry does not need to be complicated. Just simply sense your self and do not worry about inside or outside or going deeper. Sense that you exist right now, and then stay with that sense of "I" or "me". But do not worry about whether it is the right way of sensing your self. Simply sense your self just as you are right now. Once you sense your self just as you are right now, simply stay with that sense of your self. If a thought or feeling arises, notice who is having the thought or feeling. Obviously "I" am having the thought or feeling. And so then you just return to staying with that sense of "I"

That is all you need to do to practice [self enquiry](#). Just rest while sensing your self. Everything else is up to divine grace, and it is taking good care of you.

## Another form of the self inquiry question

Here is another excerpt from *Nirmala's book, [Nothing Personal](#)* that explores another form of the self-inquiry question:

[Self-inquiry](#) is the practice that's offered in the tradition I come from. Inquiry is a way of exploring our experience and our Being. There are many possible questions. The granddaddy of them all is the question Who am I? One thing that has always bothered me about that question is the presupposition that I am a who—I am a somebody. The question *What* am I? is a little more open to other possibilities, but there's still a presupposition that I am some thing.

So, lately, I've been playing with stripping that question down to the question Am I? and noticing what that's like, what discovery that allows. This question not only eliminates presuppositions but brings the questioning down to something very fundamental, which is the simple fact of our existence. And yet in exploring this, it turns out that this is not such a simple fact; our existence is a profound mystery. The question also could be rephrased as Do I exist? If the question is kept this simple, then the answer is always in the affirmative—there is existence here. I am. But it gets dicey if you start adding anything to it.

This question Am I? points to the simple fact that you *are*, regardless of what you are experiencing. Beneath everything that's going on, is a sense of existing. This form of the self-enquiry question points to a dimension other than experience.

Once that sense of existence is in your field of awareness, then it's possible to find out what's true about your existence, to explore that. What's it like right now to just be? Is it enough right now to just exist? Or is there a sense that it's not enough? All our lives we've been told it's not enough: You have to be smarter, richer, prettier, more enlightened, more compassionate, more loving, and on and on. You have to be some *thing*.

We have the sense that if we could just *be* what we're supposed to be, then we could just be. Take a fantasy about being richer, for instance: What's great about being richer is that you think it will finally allow you to just be because you no longer have to become richer. We think that being richer or smarter will finally allow just being to be enough. Wherever this inquiry takes you, it's amazing to discover both the extent to which our existence is enough and the extent to which we think it isn't.

For most, this sense of existing is associated with the body. Existing seems to happen there. However, does your sense of existence stop where your body stops? Discover for yourself where your experience of *I am* is right now. Is it in the body or is the body in it? Would it be more accurate to say "I exist in the body" or "the body exists in *me*"? Be willing to hold the possibility that who you are goes beyond the body even if you aren't experiencing that directly right now. The experience of the body never goes away, but the link between the *me* and the body can soften or dissolve when "I am the body" is seen as only part of the truth. If you experience the *me* outside the body even a little, then the body can't be the whole truth of who you are.

Where does your sense of *me* stop? Right now, for instance, allow more of your experience of the room in. When you include in your awareness the energy and information that's flowing in and out of the body, is there a greater or lesser sense of *me*? What is more true, to say, "I exist in this room" or "this room exists in *me*"? When you include the totality of the room and beyond, are you more in contact with your *me* or less in contact with it? Most people find that the more they include in their experience, the larger their sense of *me*. When you ask these self inquiry questions, you discover there's not such a clear-cut boundary to *me*.

Of course, this exploration doesn't have to stop with your body or with this room. Try sensing the reality of the surrounding city. Is there a greater or lesser sense of *me* when you do this? You can also ask the question: Do I exist in space or does all of space exist in *me*? Which feels truer?

### About Nirmala:

After experiencing a profound spiritual awakening in India, nondual spiritual teacher, Nirmala has been offering satsangs and guidance for self enquiry in the U.S. and internationally since 1998. Nirmala offers a unique vision and a gentle, compassionate approach, which adds to the rich tradition of inquiry into the spiritual truth of our true nature. In his mentoring sessions with individuals and in the book, *Living from the Heart*, Nirmala points to the wisdom within each of us, and fosters the individual's own [self inquiry](#) and exploration of

their full potential for [realization](#) to the spiritual truth of who we are. Nirmala lives in Sedona, Arizona with his wife, Gina Lake, and their two corgi's, Bodhi and Gracie. If you enjoy the self inquiry teachings of Ramana Maharshi, Robert Adams, and Adyashanti , along with the tenderness, wisdom and grace of Nirmala's own spiritual teacher, Neelam, you will especially appreciate Nirmala's writings, including the story of his own spiritual journey through **self-inquiry**.

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